

THE ABOLITIONIST

WINTER 2016

FREE TO PEOPLE IN PRISONS, JAILS, AND DETENTION CENTERS • ESPAÑOL AL REVÉS

ISSUE 25: POLICING

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

The 25th issue of *The Abolitionist* is inspired by the dynamism and creativity of renewed struggle against the repressive force of policing and its deadly logic. Our imaginations have been fired up by the anti-policing roots of the Egyptian Revolution, the spirited and restless community self-defense against militarized occupation in the streets of Ferguson, and the transformation of fear and grief into boundless solidarity in response to the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa. In our moment, as throughout history, we see that every new mass struggle produces new activists, organizations, and tactics. With our newest issue of *The Abolitionist*, we hope to continue deepening and extending discussions about the means available to movements in search of liberation, the actual obstacles to our flourishing and the potential trap of resistance directed toward renovating repression.

We begin from an understanding of policing as a social relationship made up of a set of practices that are empowered by the state to enforce social control. Rather than a discrete agency serving a separate purpose, policing is a defining feature of the prison industrial complex (PIC). With origins traced to the Slave Patrols of the 18th Century, modern police forces in the United States have been used to restrict the mobility and freedom of indigenous, migrant, and enslaved Black people, suppress the demands of poor and working people, and enforce narrow cultural norms against women, gender nonconforming people, and youth. As we broaden our attention beyond spectacular incidents of brutality and murder committed by local police or security officers, we reveal the routine and historical use of surveillance, repression, and control to manage the insecurity and violence produced by ongoing dispossession and exploitation on a global scale. Rather than keep us safe, policing protects a system that increasingly threatens our lives, communities, and future.

SOPHIA DAWSON

With modest tools we combat the pacification of policing, carefully crafting connections toward building the power and scale of our resistance. In this issue of *The Abolitionist*, activists pierce prison and border walls to share strategies, stories, and provocative questions. With pieces such as “Do Black Lives Matter?” by Fred Moten and Robin D.G. Kelley, we discuss the war on Black life, resistance, and the necessity of working toward decolonization in a state where police are sent into communities like drones in an occupied territory. We investigate the various ways that policing appears – the war on drugs, the war on gangs, the war on sex workers, the war on homelessness, etc. – and connect them as ultimately nothing less than “a justified reason to keep on attacking the communities we live in,” as prisoner Peter Sierra writes in “Don’t Believe the Hype.”

We look to the future, and how we are to build in our “post-Ferguson” era of increased organizing and resistance to policing. In “After August 9,” Rachel Herzing offers powerful words of hope and direction, encouraging movements to settle not with what they think they can win, but to demand what they want: “Now is the time to strengthen ties between the wide range of efforts—national and statewide policy campaigns, direct actions and mobilizations, community projects and programs—to strike blows against the violence of policing and against the prison industrial complex as a whole.”

And finally, we celebrate and are inspired by victories everywhere, as with the various pieces in this issue that lift up the historic settlement win reached by solitary prisoners in California against the prison regime’s notorious use of isolation.

Refusing an ever-narrowing path from court room to cage, PIC abolition is led by a vision of liberation that grows our capacity to care and resist, to overcome state and interpersonal violence, and transform our conditions in addition to ourselves. We publish *The Abolitionist* as a labor of love and struggle, and we create and share this resource with hope that it will nourish our common fight to create a life and world free from the violence of prisons, policing, and empire.

In Solidarity,
The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

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People v. NYPD

Lessons from New York City’s Struggle for Less Police

BY ALEX S. VITALE

What does it mean to take an abolitionist approach to policing? Much of the current discourse by media, politicians, many community activists, and police reformers focuses on trying to make improvements to the demeanor of the police through enhanced training, greater diversity within the ranks of police, and a focus on a variety of “procedural justice” reforms designed to get officers to follow proper procedure and do a better job of communicating with the public they interact with about the reasons for the interactions.

Many groups here in New York City are actively engaged in calling for such reforms. A new movement for police reform was already underway in New York and some other parts of the country before last summer’s police killings in New York and Ferguson. These new formations were driven less by a specific incident and more because of two inter-related phenomena; the overall growth of invasive and aggressive policing and the rise of community based projects attempting to organize young people of color, with a focus on criminal justice issues. Here in New York, groups like the coalition Communities United for Police Reform (CPR), the Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP), New Yorkers Against Bratton (NYAB), and a number of copwatch groups were all pursuing various strategies to reduce abusive policing, mostly in response to the problem of widespread “stop and frisk” practices.

One of the challenges facing these groups has been to develop a meaningful agenda for change that moves beyond past efforts at reform that have often been unsuccessful. CPR, which is a large coalition made up of mostly community-based organizations and legal service providers that work directly with the communities most likely targeted by policing has focused on mobilizing their members around legislative reforms at the local and state

MANY ACTIVISTS THOUGHT THAT THAT IN THE WAKE OF THE LARGE BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS IN NEW YORK AND AROUND THE COUNTRY THAT THE CITY COUNCIL WOULD BACK A SERIES OF REFORM EFFORTS RATHER THAN CALLING ONCE AGAIN FOR MORE POLICE. THEY WERE MISTAKEN.

level that deal directly with specific abusive policing practices as well as strengthening police accountability mechanisms. In 2013 they were successful in passing the Community Safety Act, which among other things, created a new independent Inspector General of Police with the power to investigate a wide variety of NYPD policies and practices and make public recommendations for reforms. They also continue to work to reign in illegal stops and searches through bills that would require police to obtain specific consent for searches and provide a card identifying themselves to any person they interact with. This later demand was recently agreed to by the NYPD as part of the remediation process tied to the successful “Stop and Frisk” court victory *Floyd v. City of New York*. CPR was also active in working to get Governor Andrew Cuomo to give the state Attorney General, Eric Schneiderman the power to investigate questionable police killings, given the inherent conflict of interest this poses for local prosecutors. They are also a major part of a growing network of local activism for police reform that recently released a guide to reform called “Building Momentum from the Ground Up: A Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing,” released by The Center for Popular Democracy and PolicyLink.

PROP has been focused on a wide range of abusive practices, many of which are tied to “broken windows” based policing and the NYPD’s notorious quota system. They have

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Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

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LETTER
TO THE
EDITORS

Hello!

I just read the article on Compassionate Release in the fall 2014 issue – and I am absolutely amazed that Massachusetts is in the same mess as California!

I am 78 years old, 2 years into a 5-year net sentence for a sex crime. Although lawsuits against the California prison system have flourished for over 10 years, California government continues to bob and weave to avoid reducing prison population. Courts continue to levy heavy sentences without regard for state prison budgets and the zero reduction of recidivism. Rehabilitation programs for sex offenders do not exist, while other types of rehab programs disappear regularly. “We the sheeple” are too focused on their TVs and credit card limits to care about anything. “Tough on crime” politicians tell the same stories and lies to get elected and reelected. Business as usual!

I applaud you for your efforts to create some positive change but urge you not to expect anything good with any substance from Eric Holder, talking face for current government. In fact, changing the political party in power isn’t likely to do anything more than give us new scripts, delivered by “new” faces.

As the article infers, it will require more and more support of people like yourselves by the complacent public, before change will occur. So to that end, you have my commitment and respect.

Jimmy Gee at Corcoran

After
August 9

BY RACHEL HERZING

In August 2014, I was back and forth across the country to my parents’ house while my mom waged what would be the end of a years long battle with cancer. I was, obviously, distracted from the outside world as well as many of the things that dominate my thinking under normal circumstances. I remember seeing the news about Michael Brown’s murder and how his body had been left in the street in Ferguson, MO, for hours. I also remember initially thinking, “not again” but not thinking anything much more spectacular than that. During decades of thinking about and fighting against the violence of policing, I had become too accustomed to stories of callousness, brutality, and murder at the hands of law enforcement. Just weeks earlier, I had watched the chilling video footage of the deadly assault on Eric Garner as he begged for air. My mind wandered back to the dying right in front of me and away from the TV.

But it wasn’t business as usual in Ferguson. And in the days and weeks that followed, the resistance there caught and kept my attention. The uprising in that town in response to Brown’s death added fuel to the glowing embers of an ongoing movement in need of a fresh spark. While clearly an extension of years and years of battling against the genocidal practices of US law enforcement toward Black people, the response in Ferguson was big, loud, and persistent. Despite law enforcement using its same old methods—calling out special tactics teams, escalating repression, using chemical weapons, implementing a curfew, and calling in the military for back up—night after night for weeks and weeks protestors resisted efforts to be silenced and pacified. And while the initial uprisings may have been spontaneous, the sustained effort benefited from a broad base of support including, but certainly not limited to local support from organizations such as the decades old St. Louis-based Organization for Black Struggle, national support and exposure from the authors of #BlackLivesMatter, and international solidarity from Palestinian organizers offering information on dealing with tear gas. The resistance ignited in Ferguson and spread across the US captivated the world’s attention, and it hasn’t been business as usual since.

As I write this in August 2015, I think about how the past year has been filled with more talking, thinking, and doing about the impacts of policing on residents of the US (especially Black people) than any I can remember in recent history. The sheer quantity of conversation on the topic means something. That the conversations are spilling off front porches and jumping off Twitter feeds and Facebook pages, and permeating the news and popular culture, is evidence of a real shift. That these conversations are happening at household, local, state, regional, national and international scales is also an indication of change in consciousness. That the conversation is not centered around bad apples and exceptional circumstances is also new. Young people have been driving this recent surge of activity and have not allowed themselves to be co-opted by some of the figureheads frequently circuit riding the pain of Black death. The leadership of groups including (and again it’s important to note this is just a small sample) Millennial Activists United, Dream Defenders, and Black Youth Project 100 have helped connect the dots across the country and used new media to draw communities together virtually and physically to take collective action. The breadth, depth, and skill of this young leadership is an important recent shift. And shifts suggest the possibility of real change. The persistent question, however, is how to translate possibility into concrete gains.

There is no question that the impact of the past year’s protest, direction, action, information sharing, and discussion has shifted the terms of the public conversation about policing, state violence, and Black communities. It’s not clear, however, that fewer people have been killed by the cops this year than last, that fewer people have experienced that debilitating pressure, harassment, threats, and violence of regular policing practices. Nor is it clear that Black people have any more power or less to fear from the state than a year ago.

In considering what has not changed, I wonder about levels of curiosity, acknowledgement, and respect for the long histories of organizing that made the current period possible. I’m not talking here about lists of names on t-shirts or iconic images emblazoned on propaganda, but evidence that knowledge that is clearly drawn from the lived experiences of people that have been hard at work for decades is being recognized and digested. I’m not suggesting that anyone follow blindly or get stuck in ruts that take us back to the same cul-de-sacs over and over, but rather that we humbly apply good lessons learned



MAZATL

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tance to policing has changed and what gains our resistance has facilitated.

But even if we understand the latest wave of protest as part of the lineage of movements for Black people that include Civil Rights and Black Power, we must also acknowledge the people and organizations that have populated the movement against the prison industrial complex since that period. The past year did not emerge from a vacuum. The slow, steady, and unglamorous work of building a common sense and bases to fight the dominance of the PIC is what made the uprising in Ferguson resonate so strongly. The decades of struggle against state violence targeting Black communities created the context in which new people became energized and activated. The new messages and tactics have spoken clearly to a vast set of new audiences and have been able to move people that were not moved before, but they did not emerge from an absence. Recognizing the breadth and depth of the existing movement is crucial for continuing to build it in a way that sustains the incredibly important gains made during the past year while not being satisfied with raising consciousness without also shifting power.

For organizations like Critical Resistance that have contributed to this period by maintaining the focus and thrust of the work it’s been doing since 2001 to eliminate the violence of the PIC, the movement questions being raised during this period may not be new, but must nonetheless be reconsidered. How can Critical Resistance and its allies apply their commitment to collaboration toward forging alliances and coalitions that respect the energy and draw of direct action and protest while continuing to push beyond consciousness raising and demands of recognition toward shifting power? Similarly, how can organizations work together to sustain a movement over the long term that recognizes the necessity of groups playing different roles without being coerced into believing that one group or tactic is the answer to the complex problems we face? Further, how can groups engage in the principled struggle around goals, targets, tactics, and messages necessary for building a strong movement without defensiveness or competitiveness?

Now is the moment to ask for what we want. How can we build a willingness to divest from policing rather than begging cops not to do the job they signed up for? How can we commit to a strategy that builds incremental steps toward that goal that bring along as many people as possible? Now is the time to divest from policing. Now is the time to strengthen ties between the wide range of efforts—national and statewide policy campaigns, direct actions and mobilizations, community projects and programs—to strike blows against the violence of policing and against the prison industrial complex as a whole.

Rachel Herzing is a cofounder of Critical Resistance.

Do Black Lives Matter?

ROBIN D.G. KELLEY AND FRED MOTEN IN CONVERSATION

The following is a transcription of a Critical Resistance event, which brought Fred Moten and Robin D.G. Kelley to discuss policing, the war on Black people, and the Black Lives Matter movement that gained widespread attention after the protests in Ferguson responding to the murder of Michael Brown. The conversation was moderated by Maisha Quint on December 13, 2014 at Bethany Baptist Church in Oakland, CA.

FRED MOTEN:

What Robin Kelley says in ‘Why We Won’t Wait’ seems to me to be absolutely true, and so true and sometimes so obscure that it needs to be repeated again and again. Which is to say that we’re in a state of war. George W. Bush declared a “War on Terror” and that quickly came to be understood as a permanent war, but that was just an extension of a war that we’ve always been in. And I think that insurgent social life – Black social life – has always been as terrible to the likes of Bush as anything that Osama bin Laden ever did or thought about doing.

It’s important to understand that the drones that are sent into our communities that go by the name of Darren Wilson, or Daniel Pantaleo, or Justin Volpe, or Stacey Koon, they represent a long-standing tradition of brutal and violent technological innovation visited upon us in the most horrific ways. And in a weird way, the drones that are sent into our community imagine themselves to be self-defensive. Settlers always think they are defending themselves. That’s why they build forts on other people’s land, and then freak out over the fact that they are surrounded. They’re still surrounded.

It’s important to understand that this doesn’t justify the violence they commit. But it’s an important thing for us to remember, because it gives us some indication of the forces that we actually represent. And we need to know something about who and what we are. With that in mind, I think it’s really important to understand not only these intense continuities, that what we’ve seen over these last few weeks and months is an extension of what Ida B. Wells called Lynch Law.

In the period Rayford Logan called the “Nadir”, immediately after Reconstruction between 1880 and 1920, a Black person was lynched at the rate of roughly 1 every 41 hours for that 40-year period. The rate has increased since then, which is again indicative of the fact that we are in a state of war. But it’s not enough to say that or to understand that, because we need to understand what it is that the state is defending itself from. And I think that in this respect the instances of Michael Brown’s and Eric Garner’s murders are worth paying some attention to, because what the drone Darren Wilson shot into that day was insurgent Black life walking down the street. I don’t think he meant to violate the individual personhood of Michael Brown. He was shooting at mobile Black sociality walking down the street in a way that he understood implicitly constituted a threat to the order that Wilson represents and that he is sworn to protect. Eric Garner, on an everyday basis, initiated a new kind of marketplace and another mode of social life. That’s what they killed, ok?

So when we say that Black Lives Matter, I think we sometimes obscure the fact that Black life matters. That insurgent Black social life still constitutes a profound threat to the already existing order of things, in its openness, its unfixity – the fact that anyone can claim it and that it can claim anybody.

In both the instances of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, these are manifestations of Broken Windows policing, and what they make clear is that we are the broken windows. We constitute a threat to already existing normative order. And I think that the police have this regulatory function that’s designed to destroy broken windows, to fix them by destroying them.

In the history of English poetry, the window has often been conceived of as a figure for imagination, as a lens through which we see, through which we envision. And part of what’s at stake is that to fix a broken window is to fix another way of imagining the world. To literally fix it, to destroy it, to regulate it, to exclude it, to imprison it. But also at the same time to incorporate it, to capitalize upon it, to exploit it, to accumulate it. This state can’t live with us and they can’t live without us. It’s important to recognize too that the broken window, the alternative unfixed window through which we see the world is not just the way in which we see something that doesn’t exist, but it’s also the way in which we see and imagine that which does exist. It’s important to imagine how things might be otherwise, but it’s also really important to understand and to see who and what we are right now. ‘Cause I think they see who and what we are. They see who and what we are through the sights of their guns, through their surveillance

mechanisms. I sometimes think they know more about who we are and what we can do than we do.

Emancipation produced two problems, or extended a problem – deepened it. The enslaved persons were protected property, and at the same time they constituted a threat in their conscious activity, every minute of the day, to the very idea of property. In the aftermath of Emancipation, when that property was no longer protected, a new set of innovations and regulations emerged under the rubric of policing. That’s Lynch Law. Broken Windows is an extension of that.

I think it’s really important to be able to understand just enough about what they do so that it can give us a more clear understanding about what we do and who we are. How we need to act, how we need to behave. Not in response to them, but in the deepest and most radical extension of the historical tendency of Black social life to constantly both imagine and enact another way of living on Earth.

ROBIN D.G. KELLEY:

“Many Black people have believed that all we had to do was act up, be rowdy, do some burning and looting, and unleash our pent-up frustration about the abominable conditions under which we’re forced to live, and the white man would be willing to grant our every wish. When white power structure answered our bottle and brick-throwing exhibition with tanks and rifles, and made the Black victims of oppression appear to be the violators of law and order, many Black brothers and sisters stalked off angrily saying, ‘We’ll show that white man.’ We came together thinking that if we could only prove to the white world just how valuable we really are, white folks would give us the freedom, justice, equality, and self-determination that we so justly deserve. We would punish them by showing our absence, and they’d be sorry and they would even make certain concessions. How childish we were. We were again reacting to the fury and design of the beast.”

That is Jitu Weusi from the article he wrote in the *Amsterdam News* November 5, 1977, talking about Black solidarity.

The injunction that Black Lives Matter certainly has captured the national imagination. And I think Alicia Garza’s really illuminating essay, ‘A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement’, really explains how the phrase and the idea had actually been misinterpreted, misappropriated, outright stolen without attribution to the queer Black women who were its creators. But mostly stripped of its radical politics. Garza lays out the terms very clearly, she writes, “Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”

Now, this affirmation is not new. It has been a first principle of Black abolitionist politics, though not necessarily the first principle. The first principle of Black abolitionist politics is marronage, is fugitivity, is “get out of Dodge”. It’s trying to reconstruct the life that was taken from us. Go back to the suffocating Negro, that, “Am I not a man or a brother?” or “Am I not a woman or a sister?”. David Walker’s appeal of 1829 basically says the same thing, as does DuBois’s ‘Program of the American Negro’ in 1915. You can go to Sylvia Wynter’s powerful response to the beating of Rodney King, when the LAPD had the category NHI, which means “No Humans Involved”. She writes in this open letter to her colleagues saying, we failed in terms of understanding what the project of Black studies is in terms of teaching people what is a human, questioning the production of the human as a category.

Every slogan has an embedded demand, a request to for action to rectify the feeling or complaint that it makes behind the slogan. In this case, it is to acknowledge us and to recognize that we matter too. To go back to Weusi’s warning: if white folks, the dominant class, and the state just recognize that our lives matter, we will be treated differently. Now, I’m not saying this is the intention of the original statement – it wasn’t – but this is what it’s become for the many people I talk to. This can easily lead some people to mistake five centuries of racism, slavery, and colonialism as negligence, or neglect; a kind of blindness to our humanity that requires a struggle to be seen. But our actual humanity is not the issue, and never was the issue. The problem lay with Western civilization’s very construction of the human.

As Cedric Robinson has been telling us for three decades, as Aime Cesaire said over

Continued on page 9, “Kelley & Moten”

A Full Victory Against Gang Injunctions in Oakland

Dear Critical Resistance supporters,

We write to you with great news: after 6 years, Critical Resistance and Stop the Injunctions Coalition have won a full victory against the use of racist and anti-youth gang injunctions in Oakland! Oakland is the first city in the country to admit defeat on all fronts, dismiss the cases in court, and drop gang injunctions from their toolbox of repressive policing schemes. This victory reminds us that wins—large and small—are within our reach, and that it pays off in the long-term to demand what we want, rather than what those in power say we are worthy of receiving.

From 2010-2012, Critical Resistance-Oakland chapter (CR-Oakland) fought tooth and nail to halt the use of racist and anti-youth gang injunctions implemented by the City of Oakland. We knew that was affordable housing and stable employment, an end to deportations, accessible and safe youth centers and meaningful education. Gang injunctions, as proven in other cities, would bring displacement and further criminalization for Black and Brown communities and ultimately lock more of our people up.

CR-Oakland and our allies in the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC) built a three-pronged strategy consisting of grassroots community organizing, sharp media messaging, and legal support to fight the two temporary North Oakland and Fruitvale gang injunctions. We grounded the struggle in an anti-policing framework and sought to lift up the voices of Oaklanders most affected by gang injunctions: those named, their families, neighbors and friends.

Week after week, we mobilized hundreds of people to City Council meetings where countless community members fiercely challenged those in power in sessions that would run past midnight. We let the City Council, the Oakland Police Department, and the City Attorney know that Oakland didn’t need and didn’t want gang injunctions and that we had our own solutions to creating strong, healthy and safe communities without cops. Over and over we advocated that City resources go to restorative justice, education and community programs that many of us have consistently been building in Oakland.

This tenacity paid off. In May 2012, we claimed a real people’s victory when the

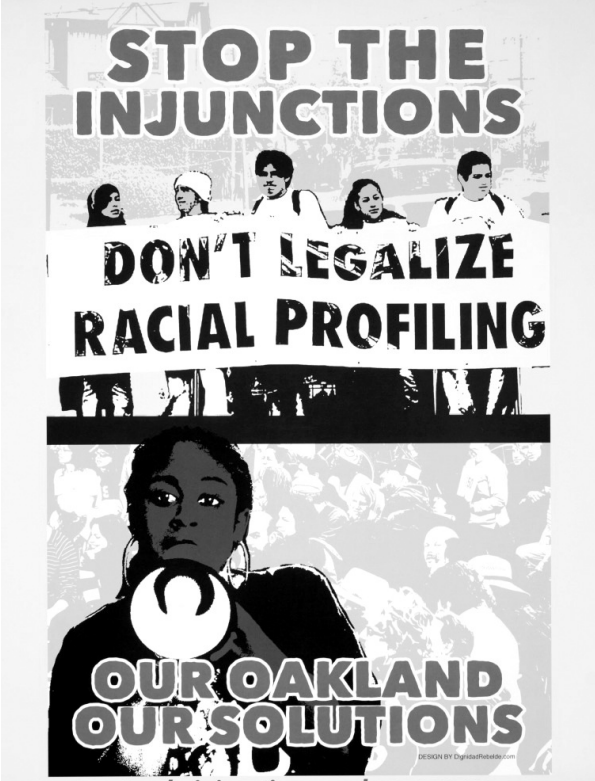
Council limited the number of gang injunctions in Oakland to 2 temporary ones (as opposed to the 10 the City Attorney originally proposed) and removed all the “John Does” from the lists, effectively preventing OPD from naming any further individuals to either injunction. Our community pressure prevented Oakland from enforcing or expanding the injunctions, because we made them too controversial and revealed their harmful impacts on our neighborhoods.

And yet, the legal battle continued to get the existing North Oakland and Fruitvale injunctions dismissed. For the last 3 years, despite the fact that OPD has moved on to other policing schemes and hasn’t been enforcing the injunctions, the city refused to relieve the 65 people targeted by the injunctions and spent millions of dollars and hundreds of hours on continued litigation. Until this month! Finally, on March 5, 2015, the City Attorney officially dropped both injunctions from the books. At last, the Oaklanders who were targeted got relief from this repressive police pressure, and they got to celebrate with their loved ones and communities.

Our work together inspired people targeted by the injunctions to become powerful organizers; it unified Black and Brown communities across the entire city in a common struggle, and drew us together to forge stronger bonds. This is what a campaign in the struggle to abolish the Prison Industrial Complex looks like. It’s long and requires patience, resolve and discipline. It requires resources to support our strategies: paint for murals, paper for outreach fliers and workshops, phone lines to call our people to mobilize to City Council, and food for community barbeques. Sometimes campaigns, like the one to stop the injunctions, take 6 years to win and need to be sustained over the long haul.

Thank you so much for your support of CR in the past. Critical Resistance is committed to carry on our work against the violence of policing, the construction of cages, and for community self-determination. The struggle continues, and we need your continuing support as we strengthen

our campaigns to stop new jails in Los Angeles and San Francisco, to end the use of solitary confinement, to raise up the voices of survivors of Attica prison in NY, and to continue to fight the violence of policing in Oakland and Portland. We are in it for the long haul and hope you will be too.



DIGNIDAD REBELDE

Resistance and Persistence

An Interview with Aida Seif al-Dawla of the El Nadeem Center

BY ALI ISSA

Dr. Aida Seif Al-Dawla is a psychiatrist, feminist, and human rights defender in Egypt. An activist since her participation in the student movement of the 1970's, she was a founding member of the New Woman Research Center in 1983, and in 1993 co-founded the El Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo. She is currently its Executive Director.

Ali Issa: How has El Nadeem formed its vision and politics?

Aida Seif al-Dawla (ASD): Our intention was to establish a clinic that focused on psychological rehabilitation for victims of torture, during a time when widespread systematic torture had not been as recognized as it is now.

Initially, we decided not to include any advocacy or human rights work and to limit our focus to therapy. Although, we did plan to map places where torture had taken place in Egypt. Within two years we realized:

- a) The majority of our clients were not “political” but just poor and marginalized people in need of help after crossing paths with the police.
- b) Torture was rampant and used for a variety of reasons beyond forcing confessions. Torture is used to induce terror, to punish, and to accentuate police power.
- c) Wherever there is police there is a possibility of torture, in police stations, in prisons, in security kiosks on campuses, in metro stations, and in the inaccessible state security headquarters.
- d) Survivors are not patients in the classical sense, and clinic-based rehabilitation alone cannot meet the needs of victims of torture. Their reaction is a “normal” response to an abnormal situation.

Over the years, people would request legal counseling and aid, publishing their stories, intervention with family reintegration, classes to help them secure employment, etc. Our work evolved to include all of this, tailored according to the needs of the survivor, and gradually we became what you may call a human rights clinic.

Can you speak about El Nadeem’s accomplishments since its founding?

I would say that the main accomplishment of the center is related to the individuals we have supported. The center has helped many people assimilate the trauma, otherwise incoherent. We trained a large number of doctors and lawyers on recognizing and documenting the psychological and physical effects of torture.

On a national level, the center has helped place torture on the agenda. When we first published testimony from our clients, people would not believe us. The notion that people have done something to warrant torture was deeply rooted and continues to be the main defense when people don’t want to believe the cruelty of the regime. I believe we have helped shake that.

What is the role of policing and torture in Egyptian society?

The classic notion is that police use torture to coerce confessions, a notion that resulted in the legal definition excluding other forms of brutality. Torture is a cowardly way of stating who is in power. It engenders terror not only in the victim but also in their family, the neighborhood, and wider society.

Political activists who are tortured understand why this is happening to them. Torture falls within the mosaic of

their lives. When they are released, they have a “choice” to continue their activism and face that risk again, or stop and hope that it won’t happen again.

But if people are tortured for no reason, the torture they suffer is incoherent. They cannot make sense of it and their family and neighbors often do not believe that they have not done anything. When they are released, they don’t know what it is they should stop doing to avoid this happening to them again. So the safest behavior is not to do anything at all, and that creates a society that is fearful, apprehensive, unquestioningly obedient. Torture maintains the power of the rulers.

Would you discuss the anti-policing roots of the 2011 uprising in Egypt?

By 2011, the brutality of the police was evident to anyone paying attention. Especially among the youth who witnessed this violence first hand during the Palestinian Intifada solidarity movement in 2000, followed by the protests against the US invasion of Iraq, and the pro-democracy demonstrations in 2005 and 2006.

The murder of Khaled Said in 2010, the terrible pictures that went viral on social media, and the determination of his family was a catalyst. Many young people identified with Khaled and he became an icon of a movement against torture and policing. I am not sure that the way the uprising evolved was expected by many, but anger spread from targeting the police to the regime as a whole, as reflected in the slogans of the revolution. The temporary “withdrawal” of the police from Tahrir Square after February 11, 2011 reinforced the feeling of triumph among the protestors, and the challenge to police authority continued through the months following the ousting of Mubarak.

It was common to hear people say that the revolution broke the fear in people’s hearts, that the people have tasted dignity and will not give in after that. But the revolution was half fought and half won, if not less, and the repression was brutal.

Can you speak about how the policing of gender and morality served political repression?

An important landmark of the January revolt was the high participation of young women. And for their involvement and militancy women faced arrests, virginity testing, organized sexual harassment in Tahrir Square and other protest gatherings.

Women protestors were defamed by media sympathetic to the regime for spending days and nights in Tahrir. Rumors spread regarding illicit sexual conduct in the tents. Some of the protestors were raped in those gang harassments, where police involvement was reported by groups who organized anti-harassment actions to support survivors. But the sexual violence and torture was not limited to women. Once in captivity the harassment was against both men and women and we have horrific testimonies of detainees who were subjected to sexual harassment or outright assault in detention going on to this day.

How have policing and torture in Egypt changed since the uprising in 2011?

Policing and torture have increased. There was no period where the police were “absent” as many claim, they were always

there. Even the popular committees which took over protection of neighborhoods, as many testified later, were infiltrated by police in plain clothes.

There was however some change over the last four years: the perception of victory, the entitlement to rights, the sense that the people can defy the police continued until June 30th, 2013.

Immediately after the ousting of Mubarak in 2011, the army took over enforcement of “discipline” and the police were reorganizing themselves. During the one year rule of Morsi, it appeared that the rank and file of the Muslim Brotherhood were taking over this role. They were the ones who stopped the protests, who clashed with protesters and who did the dirty job of torture at the presidential palace on December 4th, 2012, which to my mind was the breaking point for their rule in Egypt.

With the ousting of Morsi and the takeover by the army again, even if behind the façade of Adly Mansour for a year then Sisi, brought us to where we are now. Torture, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, collective death sentences, etc. But the horror of it all lies in the wide acceptance of those violations as a necessity to save the country from the “terrorism”. People have reported on their neighbors, in one instance on a son and in another on a daughter. In the meantime, the police have grown their force, secured their legitimacy and we are not only back to square one, but to something new that I have not witnessed in my life of 60 years.

How do you connect with people fighting for liberation and against political repression elsewhere around the world? Have you followed the movement in the US that spread in response to the killing of Mike Brown?

My connection remains in following the news, but I know several young protestors who were active in the 2011 revolt have done more. They have made contacts, some have travelled, participated and reported.

In Egypt, we are living through a tough defeat and many people are demoralized. El Nadeem and many others remain persistent. We have lived through periods where we are defamed and criticized by lifelong friends, some by their family, relationship and friendships broken, and there were times when one wondered how can this be, should one stop, is it worth it. But as a rehabilitation center, we saw how we helped people who would

have otherwise been alone. Depending on the political situation, we were either praised as heroes or abused as agents. But the wave of hostility would ebb and we are encouraged by a person who healed here or another who found a job there, and we charge our batteries and continue. Especially the therapists who are doing a great job.

The only message I have is to persist, through good or bad times.

Ali Issa is the National Field Organizer with the War Resisters League, and author of Against All Odds: Voices of Popular Struggle in Iraq.

THE MURDER OF KHALED SAID IN 2010, THE TERRIBLE PICTURES THAT WENT VIRAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE DETERMINATION OF HIS FAMILY WAS A CATALYST...AGAINST TORTURE AND POLICING.



ART: “EGYPT WILL RISE”
BY NICK BYGON

Don’t Believe the Hype

BY PETER SIERRA

Propaganda and indoctrination are the system’s primary weapons to keep those of the lower caste oppressed. These people have always and will continue to manipulate the masses to believe the ideology of their police loving government tyrannizing and poverty oppressing creed. We allow them to point in our minds their idea of a police officer standing valiantly upon a hill with their Amerikan flag flapping in the back scene in an absurd attempt to patronize those men/woman of law enforcement. We must reject and cast aside their hype filled propaganda antics. Remembering that those people who are sworn to protect and serve are sworn solely to the state and not those whom reside within the state can diminish the foolish belief that people of color matter to them. Let’s face it, not everything is what it appears-especially in the media. They wish to generalize us within the small box of opinions they have already imposed us to be. Prisoners especially. They wish to lock us in the confinements of a stigmatized belief system in which we all appear to be manipulative lying drug addicts with no further capability to change. In like manner their incompetent police officials appear to be noble and commendable with intentions of gold.

Don’t believe the hype they preach. For what they preach is a war on ethnic people of the segregated community. The system has imbedded in our geographical conditioning a deep sense of ostracism. Slavery and racism has not become obsolete, as they want us to believe, but has rather evolved to fit the propaganda of the times in this changing society. Recently in the media, Amerikan Donald Trump exposed his hate filled prejudice in referring to my people of Mexican descent as drug-smuggling rapists. Their slips of the tongue of racist and fascist missteps expose their true thoughts and feelings in regards to our people of color. The truth cannot remain hidden for a lie is short lived. The bonds of their doctrine will inevitably be exposed despite their often cunning rhetoric. We must be willing to open our eyes to their propaganda and come together to break those chains.

For we are not the same and they have never treated us contrary to how one treats an enemy; declaring war upon our communities, demonizing our people and stigmatizing our cultural roots at any given opportunity. The war on drugs, the war on gangs and every other witch hunt, they have set out to attack people of ethnic descent, has only been a justified reason to keep on attacking the communities we live in. We have all experienced the result of these laws and the mutts’ attempts to enforce them. The strong arm of these gun-tooting, trained to kill and badge baring cowards of all have convinced us that prison was a normal outcome of lives of the people whom come from our communities. The people of the government have hyped up prisons to undermine the humanity of their prisoners. They have sagaciously covered up their malice and have convinced us that they are our heroes. We must battle this doctrine of inhumanity that has become the prison system by exposing the genuine deceit of its overseers. We must stand up together with a united voice to say, “Don’t believe their hype.”

Peter Sierra is imprisoned at Kern Valley State Prison. His mailing address is

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San Francisco’s Jail

A Primary Shelter for the City’s Homeless

Originally published in Street Sheet newspaper in San Francisco.

Since 2009 San Francisco has counted those in jail who identify as homeless as part of the annual point in time count. In the most recent count released last month, the city counted 242 homeless adults in the shelter - about 20% of its total jail population. This is more than double the number counted in 2013 (126), although less than the number counted in 2011 (317) and 2009 (394).

A point in time count on a single night of the year is no way to asses the proportion of SF jail’s population that is homeless, but we can safely say a few things from these numbers. First, on any given night, the jail holds more homeless people than that are in the hospital or treatment programs combined. Second, there are typically just as many homeless people in the jail as there are in the city’s largest shelters that have between 250 and 400 beds. Third, the point in time survey found that 30% of San Francisco’s homeless people had spent at least one night in jail during the past year. In short, the county jail is by any definition a primary institution of homeless management in the city of San Francisco.

Much of this imprisonment stems from the fact that San Francisco has more anti-homeless laws than any other city in California – 23 ordinances banning sitting, sleeping, standing, and begging in public places – and is a national leader in criminalizing poverty. Political disputes over these laws are well known. But what often goes overlooked are the consequences of such laws on homeless persons.

To understand the impact of San Francisco’s punitive approach to managing homelessness, the Coalition on Homelessness (also publisher of the street sheet) surveyed 351 homeless people about their experiences with criminalization under the supervision of researchers at the UC Berkeley Law School’s Human Rights Center. The findings show that San Francisco’s policy of imprisoning its poorest not only perpetuates homelessness for those already on the streets, but actually produces homelessness and more crime in the process.

Arrest and Imprisonment: A Common Experience of Homelessness

Homeless people are more likely to be arrested because of numerous factors. Specifically, homeless people are

- often in poor neighborhoods with higher levels of policing
- caught in personal possession of drugs with greater frequency than those who use drugs in their own homes
- targeted by special anti-homeless and “quality of life” provisions designed to entangle them
- frequently searched and approached due to complaints against their very presence.

We found that the majority—59%—of survey respondents had experienced imprisonment, and that 44% had been imprisoned multiple times, with their most recent imprisonment having occurred within the last three years.

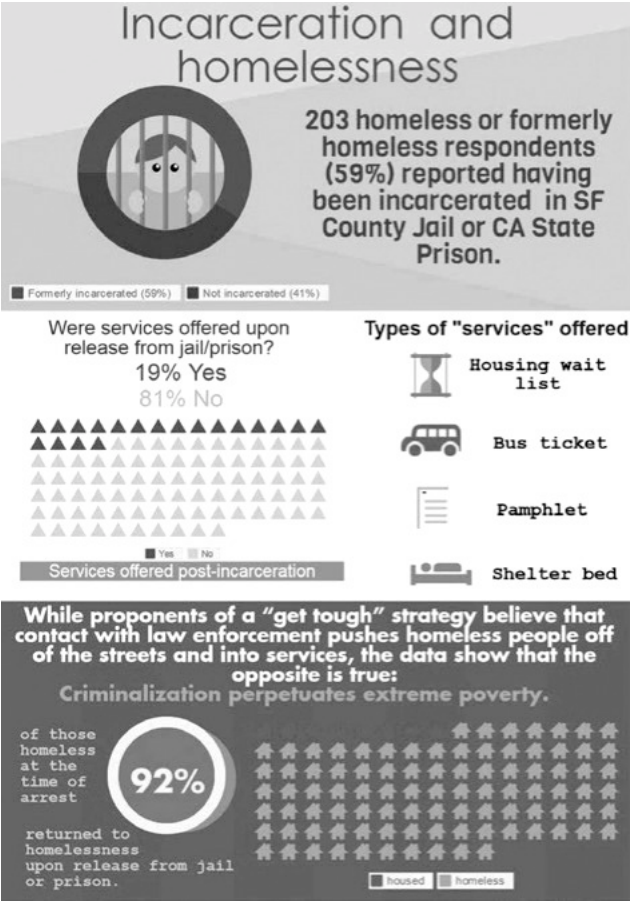
While surveyors did not ask respondents about the reasons for their arrests or imprisonment, we can infer from statistics on arrest and imprisonment statewide and in San Francisco that the vast majority were for non-violent, poverty-related offenses. Nearly 6,500 arrests in the state of California are attributable directly to anti-homeless laws. Most homeless respondents to the last point-in-time survey who had been imprisoned reported that they were in jail for five days or less. The short duration of imprisonment means that most homeless people who are in jail are there simply because they are too poor to afford bail. The San Francisco Public Defender reports: “85% of the roughly 1,300 inmates in county jail haven’t been convicted of anything. That’s more than 1,000 men and women. They are there not because they have been found guilty, but because they simply cannot afford bail.”

Short stays in jail not only entangle homeless people for longer periods of time due to their poverty, but also effectively un-house a number of people. Miles, a 51-year-old white man who camps, reported the impact of an arrest on his life: “When I got arrested last time, that was when my marriage ended... They didn’t let me call work to explain (what happened). It took me two and a half, three days to explain to work why I was MIA. I lost my job after that... It kicked off my divorce, which was the beginning of the end for me. I lost my house.”

A short period of imprisonment can also be traumatic and disruptive, threatening physical and mental health. Z, a 22-year-old Black woman who stays in transitional housing, remembers being arrested and imprisoned after she defended herself against domestic violence.

Emotionally, I felt so dead inside. You expected me to be a criminal... They took pictures of me when I came in... There was only a nurse with a Q-Tip... I’m in a holding cell. I’m locked up at this point, being treated like a dog... They kept me for four days, which included my birthday... (Later) I held up a sign reading ‘A citizen was falsely arrested. Zero investigation was done. I wonder what a civil rights lawyer would have thought about it?’ ...I just experienced a PTSD moment in a domestic violence situation, and then I’m in jail like I’m a criminal.

In effect, the San Francisco jail is warehousing poor and homeless people. The vast majority of people in jail in San Francisco have not been found guilty of a crime. High bail amounts ensure that homeless people will remain in jail for minor offenses before they are even tried, often unable to finance the lowest \$500 bond in bail, while wealthy people accused of more serious offenses are released. The use of bail exacerbates racial inequalities: Most people who are in the San Francisco jail because they’re too poor to afford bail are people of color, like Z. Because they cannot afford bail, the county incarcerates them at a cost of \$173 per day.



Re-Entry: Homeless by Criminalization

While proponents of a “get tough” strategy believe that contact with law enforcement pushes homeless people off of the streets and into services, the data indicate that the opposite is true: Criminalization perpetuates extreme poverty. Two thirds of respondents who reported being imprisoned were homeless at the time of arrest. Of these, fully 92% returned to homelessness after their release. However, one third of respondents reported being housed at the time of their last imprisonment. Of this group, a significant portion, 34%, reported becoming homeless at the time of their release. In other words, while most survey participants’ housing status did not change as a result of imprisonment, they were far more likely to end up homeless or lose their housing than they were to end up housed upon release.

According to the Re-entry Council’s Access and Connections Subcommittee, people who were poor prior to imprisonment often leave jail with nowhere to go, and no way to access the social networks that supported them before arrest.⁸⁷ The penal system rarely provides opportunities to connect with services or resources that can ameliorate poverty. Only 19% of survey participants who spent time in jail or prison were offered services upon release, compared to 81% who were offered noth-

SF JAIL BY THE NUMBERS

- 10-24%** SF Jail inmates who are homeless on any given night.
- 30%** Homeless people who spent at least one night in jail in the past year.
- 44%** “Chronically” homeless people who spent at least one night in jail in the past year.
- 22%** Homeless people who spent more than five days in jail.
- 56%** SF jail population that is Black.
- 85%** SF jail population has not been convicted of a crime.

Source: Applied Survey Research, San Francisco’s 2013 Point in Time Count.

ing. Furthermore, in most cases, the “services” participants identified were minimal, and included things like “a bus ticket.” To make matters worse, imprisonment can cause people to lose their benefits such as General Assistance or Social Security, or to lose their health insurance.

Not only do homeless people who are imprisoned often lose their benefits, and only source of income, but imprisonment also creates further barriers to getting a job, a key determinant of housing access on the private market. Most employers conduct background checks, and discriminate against prospective employees who have a criminal record. Even in states that have banned background checks, information about criminal history is often easily accessible online. One year after release, 60% of formerly imprisoned people remain unemployed. Among those who are able to secure post-release employment, wages are an average of 40% lower than wages of someone with the same level of education who has never been imprisoned. This earnings gap persists throughout the formerly imprisoned person’s working life. Furthermore, a criminal record can disqualify one for various housing benefits. It is therefore not surprising that those who have been imprisoned, whether homeless at the time of arrest or not, are at high risk of homelessness upon release.

A New Policy Approach

One way to prevent both homelessness and imprisonment of homeless people with disabilities is through provision of permanent supportive housing that offers voluntary harm reduction-based services. A number of studies have shown that increased investment in permanent supportive housing reduces costs related to hospitalization and imprisonment—both expensive ways to respond to extreme poverty. In 2001, San Francisco’s Budget and Legislative Analyst found that supportive housing resulted in significant net cost savings by reducing public costs related to imprisoning and providing emergency services for chronically homeless San Franciscans. In New York, a controlled study found that provision of supportive housing to homeless people with psychiatric disabilities resulted in less spending on the imprisonment of members of this group. Housing can break the cycle of homelessness and imprisonment: people who have stable housing are less likely to end up in jail; and people who have never been imprisoned are less likely to become homeless. Nonetheless, city officials have proposed to invest heavily in law enforcement rather than in adequate access to housing and health services.

Through this year’s budget process, San Francisco has the opportunity to choose whether it wants to follow the national trend of criminalizing poor people, especially poor people of color, or invest in racial and economic justice. San Francisco has historically relied on policing as its primary response to poverty. With adequate resources allocated to voluntary mental health services, deeply affordable housing, and free residential drug treatment, San Francisco could stop the mass imprisonment of homeless people.

*The **Street Sheet** is the oldest continuously published street newspaper in the United States. Organizationally, it is the public education and outreach tool of the Coalition on Homelessness. Every month, the Street Sheet reaches 32,000 readers through 230 homeless or low-income vendors. Our vendors are charged nothing for the papers they receive, and keep all money they earn through Street Sheet distribution.*

SEND US YOUR WRITING AND ARTWORK!

We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and art (in English and Spanish).

Ideas for Articles and Artwork

- Examples of current prisoner organizing
- Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
- Ways to help keep yourself and others physically and mentally healthy while imprisoned
- Updates on what’s happening at the prison you’re in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
- Legal strategies and important cases that impact prisoners
- Alternatives to policing, punishment, and prison
- Experiences of life after imprisonment
- Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue

What to Submit

- Articles should not be more than 1,500 words (about 5 handwritten pages)
- Letters should not be more than 250 words
- Empowering artwork that will print well

How to Submit

- If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it as you would like it printed. If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece
- If possible, send a copy of your submission, not the original

Writing Suggestions

- Try to write an outline before you write the piece. Ask yourself: does the first paragraph tell the reader what the article is about? Do the middle paragraphs support and strengthen the main argument. Does the last paragraph have a conclusion and some suggestions for action?
- Even if writing is difficult for you, your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing it with someone else. Doing this might help you clarify the ideas in your submission.

Send your submission to:

The Abolitionist (c/o Critical Resistance)
1904 Franklin St., Suite 504
Oakland, CA 94612



Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity

Statement by Plaintiffs on Solitary Settlement in Ashker v. Brown

On September 1, a historic settlement was reached in a class action lawsuit on behalf of SHU prisoners against CDCr. The settlement effectively forced California to end indeterminate SHU terms, placement in the SHU based on gang validation, and to severely restrict its use of solitary. Below is a statement by prisoners involved in the lawsuit.

This settlement represents a monumental victory for prisoners and an important step toward our goal of ending solitary confinement in California, and across the country. California’s agreement to abandon indeterminate SHU confinement based on gang affiliation demonstrates the power of unity and collective action. This victory was achieved by the efforts of people in prison, their families and loved ones, lawyers, and outside supporters. The movement began with a foundation of unity based on our Agreement to End Hostilities, an agreement between the various ethnic groups in California prisons to end the violence between us. This agreement reaches not only state prisons, but has inspired jail detainees, county prisoners and our communities on the street to oppose ethnic and racial violence. From this foundation, the prisoners’ human rights movement is awakening the conscience of the nation, to recognize that we are fellow human beings. As the recent statements of President Obama and of Justice Kennedy illustrate, the nation is turning against solitary confinement. We celebrate this victory while at the same time, we recognize that achieving our goal of fundamentally transforming the criminal justice system and stopping the practice of warehousing people in prison will be a protracted struggle. We recommit to that fight, and invite you to join us.

Signed,
Todd Ashker
Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa
Luis Esquivel
George Franco
Richard Johnson
Paul Redd
Gabriel Reyes
George Ruiz
Danny Troxell

Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition Statement on the Settlement in Ashker v. Brown

September 1, 2015

The Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition (PHSS) supports the victory of California prisoners in transforming and severely limiting the use of solitary confinement by the prison system.

Prisoners in long-term solitary confinement in Pelican Bay, including people moved to isolation cells in other prisons achieved a groundbreaking legal settlement in their class action suit against the state of California today, September 1, 2015. The legal terms effectively end indeterminate long-term solitary confinement in California prisons.

In a statement, prisoner representatives write that “This settlement represents a monumental victory for prisoners and an important step toward our goal of ending solitary confinement in California, and across the country.”

The prisoners’ victory in this struggle to drastically limit the use of solitary confinement was led by the prisoners themselves – by their ability to organize massive support for their demands within the prisons, by their calling for racial unity in the Agreement to End Hostilities of 2012. “The movement began with a foundation of unity based on our Agreement to End Hostilities, an agreement between the various ethnic groups in California prisons to end the violence between us,” the prisoners wrote.

The prisoners embarked on two hunger strikes in 2011, and another in 2013 that became the largest prisoner hunger

strike in history with over 30,000 prisoners across California and the country refusing food. In 2012, they filed this lawsuit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Their struggle against solitary is a long-standing struggle to abolish a torturous practice that was instated to repress and attack the powerful prisoner-led movement in the 1960’s and 70’s.

The settlement changes California’s use of solitary confinement by limiting the use of punitive isolation to only cases where there has been a substantiated serious violation of “behavior.” The prison system can no longer send people to the SHU (Segregated Housing Unit) because of accusations of gang affiliation or their political ideas and interests, which currently account for why many are inside solitary.

The settlement was negotiated with the active participation of prisoner representatives, who will continue to participate formally, along with their attorneys and the magistrate judge, to monitor implementation of the terms of the agreement.

As a coalition dedicated to supporting and amplifying the prisoners’ struggle for human rights, PHSS will continue to work against solitary confinement in all its forms, to support and ensure that the terms of this agreement are implemented, and will fight any potential retaliation that the prisoners may face for this victory.

The prisoners’ statement ends with an acknowledgement that this historic settlement is just one part of a longer struggle against solitary confinement and the system of imprisonment in general. It reads: “We celebrate this victory while at the same time, we recognize that achieving our goal of fundamentally transforming the criminal justice system and stopping the practice of warehousing people in prison will be a protracted struggle. We recommit to that fight, and invite you to join us.”

THE PELICAN BAY FIVE CORE DEMANDS

1. Eliminate group punishments and administrative abuse.
2. Abolish the debriefing policy and modify active/inactive gang status criteria.
3. Comply with the recommendations of the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons recommendations and end long-term solitary confinement.
4. Provide adequate and nutritious food.
5. Create and expand constructive programming.

The **Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity** coalition (PHSS)—originating in the San Francisco Bay Area and made up of grassroots organizations, family members, formerly incarcerated people, lawyers, and individuals—formed in 2011 to amplify the voices of CA prisoners on hunger strike striving to achieve their Five Core Human Rights Demands. The coalition continues to work in solidarity with CA prisoners and their families to amplify prisoners’ voices and end the torture that is solitary confinement.



Build Unity

Don’t Let CDC Undermine the Agreement to End Hostilities BY JALIL MUNTAQIM

This piece by Jalil Muntaqim was published in the SF Bay View newspaper on September 18, 2015.

The hunger strike victory – settlement of the class action suit against solitary confinement – is fantastic, but now, more hard work confronts them all. They will continue to be in a relentless fight to prevent COs (correctional officers) from destroying the unity and continued political determination of the vision for prison reform in California.

Obviously, there will come a time in which the prisoners will need to essentially rebrand, identify and complete what they started—the five demands—and to ensure the sustainability of organizing as well as build capacity to grow the work into a substantial statewide political campaign for prison reform. I sincerely hope they will consider this victory as a tactical victory, not a strategic one – especially when parole decisions continue to be constricted and there is an ongoing need for more programs that serve to support prisoners for their return to the community.

In fact, I hope they will begin the process of floating a proposal to broaden the overall campaign for prison and parole reform and ultimately end mass incarceration—demand abolition. If they can successfully make this transition, they will certainly create the paradigm for the country to replicate.

One of the first things that must be done as part of the transition and to move the prison-cultural-psychological determinant forward would be to educate the prison and public about how the state will seek to undermine their success. For example, publications should have issues solely devoted to incidents in which state officials (COs) attempt to undermine the Agreement to End Hostilities.

It is these testimonies and examples of fight-back that can serve to strengthen the capacity to build unity and uniformity in the fight. Secondly, this would broaden the future vision of the campaign from the inside out and then the outside in. I imagine family members and loved ones will want to concentrate on parole issues and prison medical and health concerns as the next major issues to be tackled.

Jalil Muntaqim has been imprisoned since 1971 when, at the age of 19, he was active in the Black Panther Party. He spent from 1975-77 in San Quentin before being sent to New York state prisons. He is currently at Anthony Bottom, 77A4283, Attica Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 149, Attica, NY 14011-0149.

Sex Work and Stranger Violence

On policing, “rescue” and abolition

BY CHANELLE GALLANT IN CONVERSATION WITH LUX

Sex workers are everywhere—an estimated 1% of the world’s population has sold sex. Many more have traded sexual labor for something they wanted, like a place to stay, drugs, safety, or other needs. Under this colonial hetero-patriarchal system, the threat of violence is real and present for many, and is deeper for more marginalized communities, including sex workers. A rescue industry has risen to “save” sex workers. But these saviors have actually done more harm than good, putting the people they claim to want to help into more danger.

Most sex workers say more safety would come from access to the resources they need. They want safe affordable housing, decent jobs, good education and food, affirming physical and mental health care including substance treatment, jobs—including sex work—with living wages and self-determination. They do not want police.

One of the objections to abolishing police and prisons is that even if we don’t need them for everyday problems, we need them for the really intense violence, like serial murderers and rapists. But the example of sex workers shows the fallacies in this argument. There are some segments of our society for whom stranger violence is a clear and present danger. Sex workers from criminalized communities are systematically preyed on by serial rapists and murderers, even if much if not most sex work is completely banal and uneventful. Addressing this issue offers PIC abolitionists an opportunity to learn about how to deal with those few individuals inflicting intentional severe interpersonal violence.

Rescuing the Ladies Of The Night—Whether They Like it or Not

“But is it safe?”—most sex workers hear this question at some point. The common belief is that the danger to sex workers is coming from sex work itself. That it’s at least unhealthy and at worse dangerous (even corrosive to the soul) to treat sex as a form of labor and then trade or sell it. Many folks assume that violence is an inevitable occupational hazard, that of course bad men will naturally direct their violence toward “bad women”. And those “bad women” are all “sex trafficked” anyway, so we need to save them. By this thinking, all sex workers are by definition victims rather than people making the best decision for themselves (even if from few options). To the rescuers, reducing harm means reducing the number of people in the sex trade.

A common solution proposed is to force sex workers out of the sex industry and into something considered “safer”—and by safer what they really mean is more gender/race/class appropriate work, like becoming a secretary, or a student.

So-called rescues vary the world over but they usually begin with a raid and arrest. In North America, a rescue is typically a combination of profiling by police, a raid (if it is on an indoor business like a massage parlor), arrests (over and over if necessary), short term detention and mandatory diversion programs into often Christian-based social services where sex workers are frequently required to identify as “trafficking victims” and denounce any future involvement in the sex trade to avoid a conviction and jail time.

When the sex work business is run by racialized migrants, these arrests are often accompanied by an immigration investigation—called an “anti-trafficking investigation.” Instead of diversion into mandatory social services and out of the sex industry, undocumented migrant sex workers are detained and deported. The police and NGO’s will count this as a rescue and use it to justify increases in funding. The funding for anti-trafficking measures is so overblown and the number of so-called rescues so pitiful that by some statistics, each “rescued” trafficking victim comes with between \$250,000-\$500,000 in funding to the organization. This

is why we call the anti-trafficking movement the ATM of the NGO world.

Save us from our saviors

What our angels of mercy don’t acknowledge is that arrest and diversion are coercive extensions of the PIC. They don’t acknowledge that contact with police increases danger for sex workers, that wages are often stolen and sexual assault by state officials is common. They don’t acknowledge that typically the sex workers, third parties (like managers or colleagues) and the clients arrested are people of color and patterns of racist and classist policing are replicated.

And what about interpersonal violence from aggressors posing as clients? Does policing “for their own good” keep sex workers safer from it? In the rescue model, aggressor violence disappears because it is the purchase of sex that is itself seen as the violent act and criminalized. In this model, clients of sex workers are sent to “John schools” where they are fed racist and misogynist misinformation about sex work and ordered to pay hefty fines that fill police coffers. Little to no distinction is made between buying sex and abuse. A sex worker still can’t be raped if just buying sex is seen as itself a form of rape.

THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX HAS LAID A TRAP WHERE SEX WORKERS ARE SYSTEMATICALLY ISOLATED AND TURNED INTO PREY.

people, and LGBTQ people).

Second, they tell us that the problem isn’t that they don’t know how to defend themselves from stranger violence—they know quite well how to do this. Even though they have been left completely vulnerable by the criminal legal system, they have developed their own effective, community-based strategies to protect themselves from cops, immigration enforcement, municipal bylaws, aggressors posing as clients, vigilantes, partners/spouses and social workers. The problem is that it’s illegal for them to do most of the things that would protect their lives from the people who see them as worthless.

Outlawing Safety

In many jurisdictions including Canada and the US, it is illegal for sex workers to live and work together, to cross state/national borders for work, to watch out for each other on the job, to share information about bad dates, to hire someone to screen clients, to screen clients using phones or the internet, to advertise or discuss services explicitly (including safer sex) and negotiate rates of pay, to run their own business, to hire

someone else to run their business, to drive them to work and offer security, to work in daylight or in well-lit public areas, to organize unions or associations, to be included in labor protections. It is illegal to pay a smuggler to help you migrate but impossible to cross the border in search of work without help. It is illegal to rent an apartment or a hotel room or host a website for a sex worker. It is illegal to work indoors but it’s also illegal to work outdoors. It is illegal to work while HIV+ but it’s illegal to carry condoms. It is illegal to be homeless but it is also illegal to hustle to survive. It is illegal not to turn a young person in the sex trade into the cops but this means that support organizations for young people in the sex trade get shut down.

Added to this is that for the most criminalized sex workers their entire existence is effectively under legal suspicion too. Black trans women (as in the case of Monica Jones and so many others), gender non-conforming young people of color, poor Indigenous women are all profiled as sex workers and as out of order for simply existing.

You get the picture: it’s a set up. The prison industrial complex has laid a trap where sex workers are systematically isolated and turned into prey. Like cockroaches, predators are drawn to that trap. Some of those predators are cops themselves. When police officer Daniel Holtzclaw was terrorizing and sexually assaulting Black women in Oklahoma City, he got away with it for years until he sexually assaulted a woman who did not have drug and sex work charges. When prosecutors laid out their case against Holtzclaw they reminded folks that Holtzclaw had finally made a mistake. They described his mistake not as raping women but as “profiling the wrong woman”. Our society has manufactured

the epidemic of violence against sex workers and responds to that by presenting the predators themselves (cops and the PIC) as the solution.

The policing of sex work, under the rubric of “rescue”, is not designed to support the safety, health and self-determination of sex workers and it never has been.

From Legalization to Decriminalization to Abolition

People who care about the lives of people in the sex trade have often called for legal regimes that respect the people’s right to sell or trade sex with safety and dignity.

Legalization and decriminalization of prostitution

Continued on next page



But what about the “pimps” then? Sex workers’ colleagues are some of the most criminalized—when they are men of color. In particular Black men are profiled this way. Frequently no distinction is made between abuse and managing a sex worker’s business. In much of the legislation surrounding sex work, being a third party is defined as intrinsic abuse and aggressively policed. Again, how can a sex worker report abuse if just “having a man” is seen as already abuse?

From having listened to sex workers, we know the risks they face do not come from selling sex. It comes first from a culture that simply doesn’t value them as respected members of our society—and that’s often based on who is selling the sex (e.g., poor and working class folks of color, trans women, undocumented

have typically been the main thrust of that work. With legalization, the power stays in the hands of the state and the bosses. The state can do things like force sex work into remote industrial areas, give workers curfews, allow cops to barge in and harass folks. Creating a category of “legal” sex work also always means that some workers remain “illegal”. So anyone who can’t get a sex work license (for example because they don’t have a work permit or ID or have a conviction) is forced to work illegally—and again, is left under-protected but over-policed.

With decriminalization, sex work is taken out of the criminal code entirely and is regulated through municipal bylaws, labour codes, etc. New Zealand is the only country to have fully decriminalized sex work and as expected, has not experienced a single case of trafficking in over 10 years.

Decriminalization is a win as pulling sex work out of the criminal statutes massively reduces harm, HIV, traumas associated with imprisonment, etc. For these reasons, hundreds of sex work organizations around the globe representing hundreds of thousands of people in the sex trade are united in their call for the decriminalization of prostitution.

Beyond this, many sex work activists also want to see the full enforcement of the laws against violence used against people who hurt sex workers. Understandably many want to see the men who rape and kill sex workers punished and sex workers lives valued. So do we. But it’s no accident that sex workers are shoved into harm’s ways and abandoned to predators. The decrimi-

nalization of sex work alone leaves in place systems of policing and incarceration that are designed to control and hurt many of our communities and still would. If the police don’t come for sex workers armed with anti-prostitution laws, they’ll still come prowling on some other charges. Decriminalization of sex work is something we both hope to see in our lifetimes—and it will always be part of a larger strategy to eliminate this part of the state.

Sex workers don’t need anyone’s rescue, let alone from the police. They already have all the safety strategies they need—they just need everyone else to get out of their way.

Chanelle Gallant is co-director of the Migrant Sex Workers Project and co-editor of prison/policing abolition blog www.everydayabolition.com. She has been an organizer, writer, educator and community builder in feminist and sex working communities for over a decade in Canada, the US and Thailand—ever since her first police raid in 2000. She also answers to the names *rabble-rouser, fallen woman,*

comrade and sister. Find her at www.chanellegallant.com.

Lux is a mother, activist, former youth and adult prisoner and former sex worker with experience working in various sectors of the industry including stripping, street and experience working /hustling as a youth. She has been published on topics such as gentrification, the prison industrial complex, sex work and youth issues. Recently, after 5 years of front line community work she has moved into the legal field and plans to

SEX WORKERS DON’T NEED ANYONE’S RESCUE, LET ALONE FROM THE POLICE. THEY ALREADY HAVE ALL THE SAFETY STRATEGIES THEY NEED—THEY JUST NEED EVERYONE ELSE TO GET OUT OF THEIR WAY.

work at meshing the two in order to continue working with and supporting the communities she loves and feels connected to.

Hugo Pinell ¡Presente!

BY ISAAC ONTIVEROS

This piece was written and sent out to CR’s networks celebrating the life of Hugo Pinell, shortly after receiving news of his death on August 12th of this year.

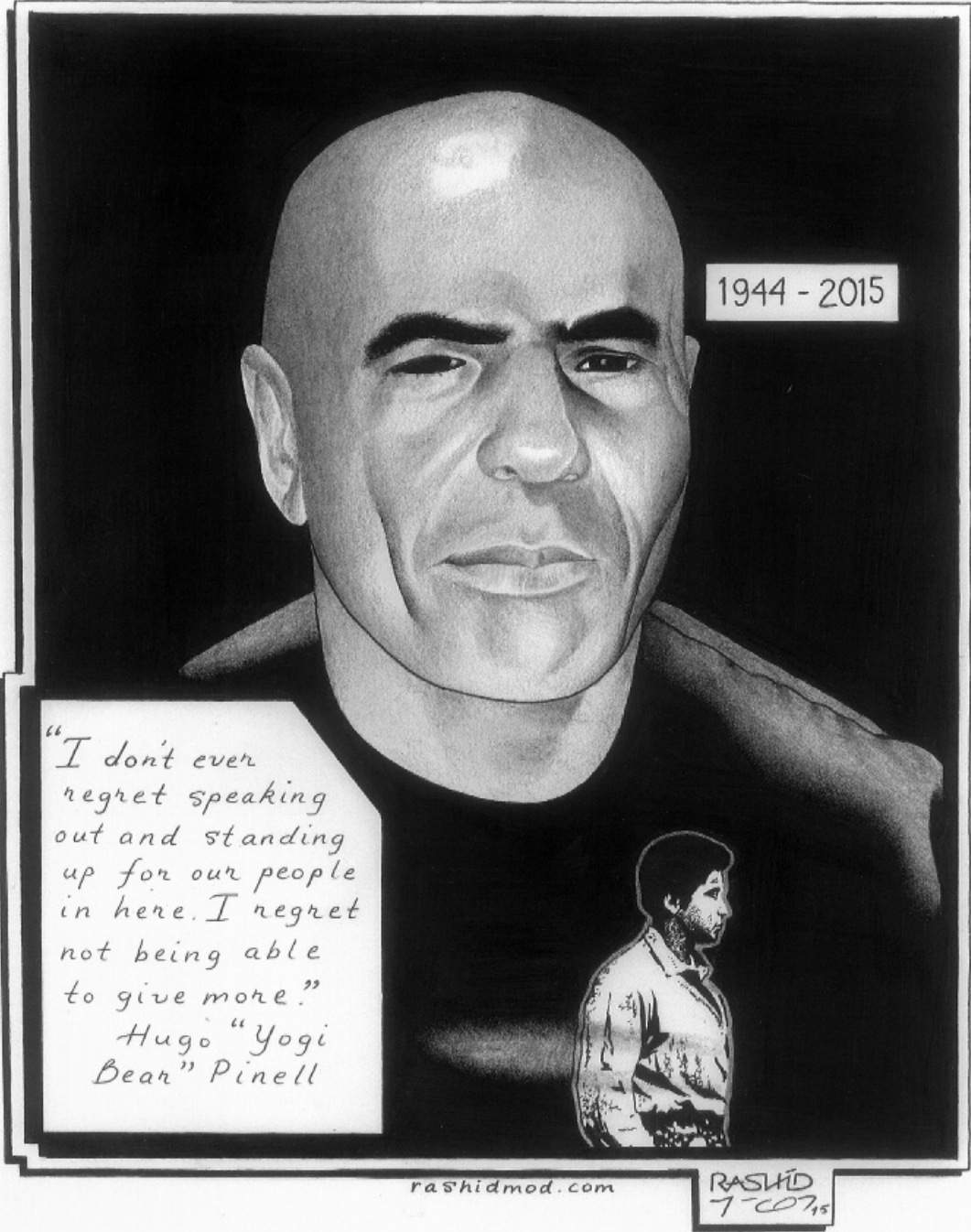
It is with very heavy hearts that we mourn the loss of Hugo “Yogi” Pinell, who was killed at New Folsom Prison this past Wednesday. Our thoughts are with his family and community.

The circumstances of Pinell’s death invoke confusion and anger. Those feelings are compounded by the prison regime’s systematic denial of communication and information, and the media’s shameful, dehumanizing “reporting” on Pinell’s death (and life). We do our best to lift our spirits by holding up Hugo’s powerful legacy.

Imprisoned since 1965, Hugo Pinell—like many other people of his time—was politicized while inside, educated and inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and other freedom movements on the outside. Hugo became a part of the Prison Liberation Movement, which saw the prison as a front of struggle connected to the global upsurge of oppressed people against colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy. This was a period of intense education, organizing, and resistance among imprisoned people—some locked up as political prisoners, some transformed while inside, nearly all targeted by prison administrations for their political stances and activism. In 1971, Hugo, along with 5 other prisoners at San Quentin State Prison in California, were charged with raising a rebellion at the facility’s Adjustment Center, during which prisoner movement leader George Jackson was assassinated. Commemoration and protest in response to Jackson’s death galvanized communities across the country, on both sides of the walls. The story and political trial of the San Quentin Six helped people across the planet to understand the conditions inside prison, the resistance of prisoners, and the connection across the walls that the Prison Liberation Movement was trying to make.

Hugo Pinell would go on to spend over 40 years in the solitary confinement units used to punish prisoners and break up their social, political, and religious organizations—indeed, Pinell was the longest held prisoner in solitary confinement in California, before recently being released into the general population. Despite the torturous conditions of solitary, Hugo remained steadfast politically, and tried to stay connected to people and struggle, inside and outside the prison. Hugo participated in the recent California Prison Hunger Strikes and was vocal supporter of prisoners’ 2011 Agreement To End Racial Hostilities. In his late 60s while on hunger strike, Hugo talked about his activism with journalist Kilu Nyasha:

I wasn’t prepared for a hunger strike, so I don’t know how well or how long I can hold on, but I had to participate...I don’t even think in terms of doing or saying something wrong, for that would strike against everything I live for freedom, becoming a new man and the New World. So, Sis, this hunger strike provides me with an opportunity



ART: KEVIN ‘RASHID’ JOHNSON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, NEW AFRIKAN BLACK PANTHER PARTY, PRISON CHAPTER.

commemorating Black August; as we continue to work to abolish solitary confinement, along with violence of imprisonment and policing; and as we continue to understand and fight for the New World, we can be renewed, emboldened, and inspired by the indefatigable spirit of Hugo “Yogi” Pinell.

Isaac Ontiveros is a member of Critical Resistance.

for change while also allowing me to be in concert with, and in support of, all those willing to risk their precious and valuable health.

As we act in solidarity with prisoner resistance and Black Liberation by

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six decades ago, the Negro was an invention, a fiction. Like the “Indian”, like the “Oriental”, like the “Mexican”. Fanon wrote about it in *Wretched of the Earth* when he said, “It is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject.” This doesn’t mean the colonizer, through the sites of his weapon, doesn’t recognize a lot about who we are and what we do. You wouldn’t need to fabricate anyone if the object of resistance wasn’t a threat. The very foundations of Western civilization are built on these kinds of fabrications. Once those fabrications crumble, so goes Western civilization’s conceit and the massive philosophical smokescreen that enables racial capitalism. That is, the smokescreen that hides the fact that you’re talking about the greatest, most destructive, most violent crime wave in history. That’s what Western civilization is, as it masquerades as an engine of progress, as a pure expression of human liberty, as the only path to human emancipation. In some ways, if we leave it at Black Lives Matter only, we unintentionally mask the crime. The entire structure of global white supremacy depends on the invention of fictions like the “Arab”, the “immigrant”. For example, we talk about immigrant rights as if they are about every single person who is not born within the confines of the United States. It’s not about that. It’s about people from Southern nations, who are actually from here, who are really indigenous.

The last thing I wanted to raise was what do we mean by life? Sidney Wilhelm published a book in 1968 called *Who Needs the Negro?* This white sociologist from Galveston, Texas, basically says that Black people are on the path to obsolescence because of automation. Within that is a critique of structural racism, based on a kind of Marxist analysis that is a critique of Marxism. Wilhelm argues that dependency on Black labor is the thing that makes Black people of value, and that the very moment that African Americans achieve formal equality is also the moment when the transformation of the economy produces their obsolescence. And we know the outcome of that – mass incarceration. But sometimes we don’t pay attention to the fact that formal equality was real. It may not exist evenly, but it’s not as if there wasn’t some form of formal equality. Formal equality enables white supremacy, enables racism, to say, “You know what? You have no barriers. So whatever happens is all your fault.”

When we think about what we mean by life, the dependency on Black labor does not translate into the value of Black lives. Slavery did not mean that Black life was valued. On the contrary, it was based on an inhuman cost-benefit analysis that assumed the disposability of Black life. The disposability of Black life is what we’re dealing with now, what we were dealing with then, and what we’re always dealing with. Always. The life expect-

tancy of enslaved people in Louisiana in 1850 was about 27 years old. So, while the value of Black labor may have ebbed and flowed with the changing of the economy, there has never been a moment in American history when Black humanity actually mattered and was defended on a mass scale, when Black people can enjoy the full privileges and protections of citizenship, which means that it’s not necessary to fight. You’re not going to convince the state to come and grant those things. So we have to go back to Fanon again. Fanon said we need to disorganize. Take the whole thing apart. Decolonize. Some think decolonization is only about indigenous people. Decolonization is a global phenomenon, a global process that we have not achieved yet.

I return to Weusi on the question of, ‘how do we fight the beast?’. And we must fight the beast because it runs a military state that is not averse to torture, locking up, beating up, killing people. It has legal sanction to take life, destroy our planet, and steal resources. In other words, Western civilization’s crime wave continues destroying our planet, destroying life. Meanwhile, you can get arrested for blocking the sidewalk. Because marronage may still be unobtainable, what Fanon calls a complete disorganization of global society may be our only real self-defense. That might seem farfetched, but if we don’t talk about the complete dismantling of this system, we’re going to keep trying to figure out who we can get elected, or what law can we change here, or we’re going to see Al Sharpton talking about this, that, and the other. We’re going to be doing it over and over again until we actually move toward decolonization.

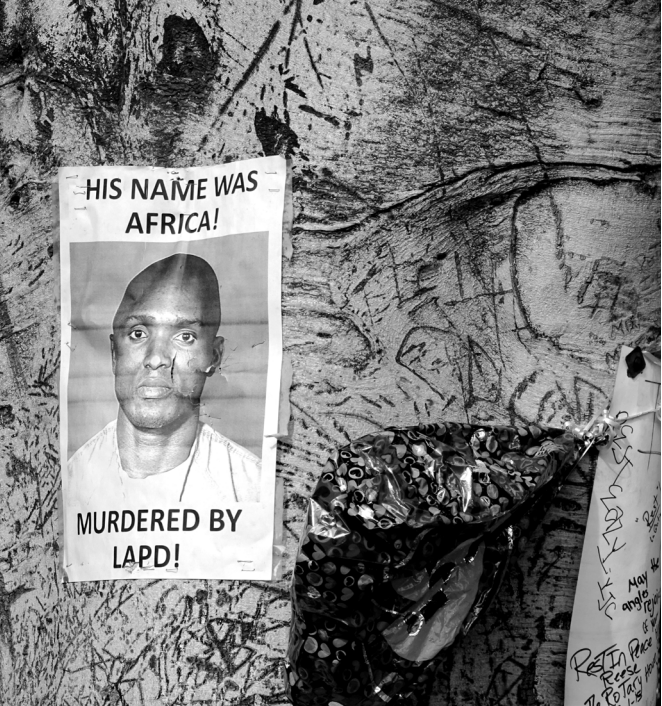
Robin D.G. Kelley, who teaches at UCLA, is the author of the remarkable biography *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (2009) and most recently *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (2012). He is a contributor to *Killing Trayvons: an Anthology of American Violence*.

Fred Moten teaches at UC Riverside, and is author of *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press), *Hughson’s Tavern* (Leon Works), *B. Jenkins* (Duke University Press), *The Feel Trio* (Letter Machine Editions) and co-author, with Stefano Harney, of *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions/Autonomedia). His current projects include two critical texts, “con-

sent not to be a single being” (forthcoming from Duke University Press) and *Animechanical Flesh*, which extend his study of black art and social life, and a new collection of poems, *The Little Edges*.

BLACK SOCIAL LIFE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AS TERRIBLE TO THE LIKES OF BUSH AS ANYTHING THAT OSAMA BIN LADEN EVER DID OR THOUGHT ABOUT DOING.

Maisha Quint is a Bay Area native who grew up in Berkeley. A staunch anti-prison organizer since high school, she worked for six years at Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and taught poetry for four years at UC Berkeley with June Jordan’s Poetry for the People program. She has organized with various political prisoner campaigns, including the Committee to Free the San Francisco 8, Friends of Marilyn Buck and the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights. She is currently a collective staff member with EastSide Arts Alliance.



CHRISTINA HEATHERTON

been less enthusiastic about some of the legislative reforms being proposed and have targeted Mayor Bill de Blasio directly for his role in perpetuating huge racial disparities in policing in New York through reports, op-eds, public events, and grassroots outreach. Their Court Monitoring Project has generated significant coverage about the racial disparities of those subjected to low level policing and the shocking nature of the police enforcement actions being undertaken such as arresting people for spitting or taking up 2 seats on the subway in the middle of the night.

NYAB was formed when de Blasio announced that he was bringing Bill Bratton back to be NYPD commissioner. Many of the early members were the family and friends of those who had been killed or abused by the NYPD when Bratton was previously commissioner. NYAB has been the most action-oriented of the new groups staging frequent protests and press conferences and even disrupting city council hearings and public appearances by Bratton. They too have been less interested in some of the legislation being pursued by CPR and have instead focused on undermining public support for Bratton while calling for greater community control of the police.

Despite the tensions within the movement about strategy and tactics, there is one issue that provided some unity in recent months: The request by the leadership of the New York City Council to hire 1,000 more police in the new budget. This has been a longstanding demand of the otherwise more progressive City Council. Mayor Bloomberg refused to increase the size of the department in his final years and Mayor de Blasio did the same during his first budget.

Blocking the hiring of more police fits squarely into an abolitionist perspective. While reforms to police culture, new training, and some policy changes may alleviate the burden of policing on communities, this is far from assured. The wave of police reforms in the 1960s and 70s actually led to major increases in police budgets and the scope of policing, leading in part to the War on Drugs, SWAT teams, and forms of “community policing” at the root of current abuses. Only legislation to decriminalize specific behaviors and take them out of the realm of police enforcement is more clearly abolitionist. Even calls for community control of police leave the basic institution intact.

Many activists thought that in the wake of the large Black Lives Matter protests in New York and around the country that the City Council would back a series of reform efforts rather than calling once again for more police. They were mistaken. Once again the City Council, under the leadership of erstwhile progressive Melissa Mark Viverito, who represents Spanish Harlem, called for the mayor to include funding for 1,000 additional officers. The initial request focused on the need to give precincts more officers to respond to a wide variety of community concerns about crime and disorder and to reduce overtime costs associated with current workloads. In many communities of color, there is strong support for intensive and aggressive policing to control crime and disorder. This is especially true among the smaller and much more conservative base of people who are actively involved in electoral politics. In some of these communities, City Council elections are decided by less than 10% of the adult population.

In part because much of the outrage over the death of Eric Garner was tied to the pettiness of his alleged offense, the call for more police to engage in low level policing generated significant objections. Over time and in response to pressure from activists the message shifted to the need for more anti-terrorism units, and concerns about increases in shootings.

Initially, smaller groups like PROP and NYAB were able to come out quickly against the proposal through a series of op-eds, social media, press conferences and street actions. NYAB pulled together a new coalition called Safety Beyond Policing (SBP), which started actively targeting Mark Viverito rhetorically and through street actions at fundraisers and other events she attended. After several months of deliberation, the

much larger CPR issued a strong statement against the new hiring. CPR is made up of a number of groups with close ties to Mark Viverito, other progressive City Council members, and the mayor. As a result, their decision to speak out generated significant media coverage. Their basic argument was that there was a need for important structural reforms of the NYPD before any increase in size should be considered.

Some nationally oriented-groups got involved as well. Million Hoodies decided to join with SBP and launched a major letter writing campaign using the new hashtag #NoNewNYPD, developed by some of the folks behind #BlackLivesMatter. They also began to work with activists in Chicago working against a similar initiative put forward by erstwhile progressives there including mayoral candidate Chuy Garcia. Unfortunately, there was little coordination among the major groups on strategy and tactics. While PROP and SPB worked together on media and small actions, larger groupings like CPR, the Justice League, and Millions March, all of whom have a track record of large mobilizations, did not undertake any street actions against the proposal, despite expressing rhetorical concerns about it. As a result the initiative passed. In fact, the mayor eventually approved an overall increase of 1,300 officers to both strengthen local precincts and increase terrorism policing.

This loss shows that progressive activists remain divided in how to deal with police abuse. Groups like CPR have wielded significant political muscle behind concrete reforms, but have limited their approach to mostly conventional lobbying within a coalition framework, rather than broad movement building. PROP has had a broader analysis and been able to respond quickly to new developments but lacks a popular base and has largely shied away from broad mobilizations and street actions. NYAB has tried to build a base but lacks the financial and institutional support enjoyed by CPR and has been unwilling to engage in the sometimes frustrating process of working in coalition with large established organizations. What none of these groups has effectively confronted is the stark reality mentioned before that even in communities of color, the bulk of politically active local residents favor aggressive policing as a solution to their crime and disorder problems. To address this, much more work is needed to articulate a progressive community safety vision that doesn’t rely on police, jails, and prisons.

Alex S. Vitale is Associate Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College. He has been organizing and writing about police accountability and reform for 25 years. His most recent essays have appeared in the *Nation*, *Al Jazeera*, *Gotham Gazette*, and the *New York Daily News*. He is also the author of *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics*. He is currently writing a book on alternatives to policing for Verso books due out in 2016.

About this issue’s centerfold
Critical Resistance’s #AbolishSolitary Campaign

July 8 marked the 2nd anniversary of the 2013 CA Prison Hunger Strike, the largest prison hunger strike in history that included more than 30,000 imprisoned people refusing meals. Many imprisoned people have asked us to show solidarity by spreading word about their struggle and to amplify their demand to abolish solitary confinement. For this anniversary, Critical Resistance launched an Abolish Solitary social media campaign to keep the spotlight on solitary confinement and advance the prisoner-led call to eliminate its use.

Starting July 8, Critical Resistance began posting images of people holding signs that read “Abolish Solitary,” and we asked people to do the same. People across the country responded to our call, and began posting images of their own with personalized messages of solidarity. In the midst of this campaign, a landmark settlement was reached in the case of Ashker v. Brown against the use of solitary, which bolstered the movement by significantly reducing California’s ability to place and keep people in solitary confinement. Here are just a few posts of the many that were shared on social media of people showing their love and solidarity to those struggling against the torturous practice of solitary confinement.

